

REMARKS

Claims 2-23 are pending. By this Amendment, claims 2 and 3 are amended and claim 1 is canceled. The claims are amended to even more clearly distinguish over the applied references. In particular, rejected independent claim 1 is canceled, and its dependent claim 2 is amended so as to depend from allowed independent claim 21. In addition, independent claim 3 is amended to add features similar to the features contained in allowed claim 21, which the Office Action indicates render claim 21 patentable. Independent claim 3 also is amended to delete the "wherein" clause that was added in the previous Amendment, but which did not result in allowance of claim 3.

Applicant submits that these amendments should be entered after Final Rejection at least because: (1) they place the application in condition for allowance, or at least better form for appeal; (2) they do not raise any new issues or the issue of new matter because, as described above, claim 3 has been amended to: (i) incorporate a feature already recited in independent claim 21 and (ii) to delete a previously added feature that did not result in allowance of claim 3, and claim 2 is amended to depend from claim 21, which includes all of the features present in original claim 1, from which claim 2 previously depended; and (3) no new claims are added.

Applicant notes with appreciation the allowance of claims 11-23, and the identification of allowable subject matter in claims 8 and 10. Applicant respectfully submits that all pending claims are in condition for allowance.

Claims 1 and 2 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) over U.S. Patent No. 5,674,302 to Nakayama et al. in view of U.S. Patent No. 6,379,438 to Schneider et al. or WO 00/18489, which is from the same patent family as Schneider et al. This rejection is moot because independent claim 1 has been canceled and claim 2 has been amended to depend from allowed claim 21.

Claims 3-7 and 9 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) over JP-A-8-38834 in view of Nakayama et al. and Schneider et al. or WO 00/18489. This rejection is respectfully traversed.

As noted above, claim 3 has been amended to recite that "the seal member has inner and outer peripheral surfaces, and the semi-melted fibers are fused to the inner and outer peripheral surfaces of the seal member." These features, which also are recited in allowed claim 21, and which are recognized in the Office Action as being absent from the applied references (see item 7 on page 7 of the Office Action), along with the other features recited in independent claim 3, render claim 3 patentable over the applied references. Accordingly, claims 4-10, which depend from claim 3, also are patentable.

In view of the foregoing, Applicant respectfully submits that this application is in condition for allowance. Favorable reconsideration and prompt allowance of this application are earnestly solicited.

Should the Examiner believe that anything further would be desirable to place this application in even better condition for allowance, the Examiner is invited to contact Applicant's undersigned attorney at the telephone number listed below.

Respectfully submitted,



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Date: February 3, 2004

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